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Mobility and agency: movement and people

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Processes resulting from and in turn (re-)shaping translocal connectivities and entanglements in economic, political and cultural contexts have significant impacts upon the social dynamics within and between the groups involved.[1] Thus they also affect the everyday lives of people. While such processes undoubtedly have a long historical dimension, they have intensified since European colonial expansion and industrialisation and acquired new dimensions »globalisation« processes since the late decades of the 20th century.[2] First steamers, railways, telegraph and telephone rapidly increased the speed, quantity and quality of travel and communication; then a further shift accompanied the invention and mass production of aeroplanes, computers and mobile phones. Yet we must be cautious not to ascribe too mono-centric a position to overarching Western paradigms and narratives of (first) an expansive imperial agenda, i.e. seeking to extend one's own markets and political terrains at the cost of others, and (second) the inadequate hierarchical account of human societies that goes along with this agenda's »modernising« vision. As Jeremy Prestholdt reminds us, when introducing his historical study on the significance of East African consumer demands for the economies of the British empire and the USA – thus tracing specific »genealogies of globalization« –, we need to keep in mind the specific ways in which the world was (and became) interconnected, and the mutuality of agency that was involved in such processes:

> Forgetting historical circumstances of interconnectivity and the reciprocity they entailed weakens our appreciation of how humans have historically affected and been affected by others, both far and near. Remembering histories of a relentlessly interdependent world can challenge contemporary fantasies of past isolation and our obsession with independent local or regional historical trajectories. Most importantly, histories of trans-societal interrelation remind us of how individual actions have often had long-term and distant consequences.[3]

This paper investigates the implications that such processes, related to interconnectivity, have had for people (especially within and from »Muslim worlds«), societies and regions where the social, cultural and political worlds are dominated or strongly influenced by Islam.[4] The empirical contexts we are particularly looking at are situated in and between Africa, South and Central Asia, and the Middle East. The character and the role of connectivities within and between these regions have

1 This paper is to a great extent based on discussions in the working group »Actors in Translocal Spaces«, ZMO 2008-2011. Most influential in the shaping of our thoughts and arguments have been the contributions and positions offered by group members Knut Graw and Samuli Schielke. This should also be clear from our references to their projects and publications, as well as to other group members where applicable. We express our gratitude to all members of the group for rich and fruitful discussions.

2 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis and London Press, 1996; Especially for the Asian perspective see: Sunil S. Amith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*, Cambridge 2011.

3 Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World. African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization*, Berkeley 2008, 1.

4 For a more detailed discussion on the concept of »Muslim Worlds« see: Ulrike Freitag, »Researching ›Muslim Worlds‹: Regions and Disciplines, *ZMO Programmatic Texts* 6 (2013), http://www.zmo.de/publikationen/ProgramaticTexts/freitag_2013.pdf (accessed 16.12.2013).

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been covered by historical and anthropological research over the past few decades. The Indian Ocean provides a primary example of a social world established through long-term social networks of trade, kinship and religion.[5] The long, ongoing historical significance of trans-Sahara connections, both for trade and religion as well as for Islamic education (reaching the centres of Islamic learning in the Hejaz), continues to be explored.[6] And the historical trading region of Central Asia, blocked off during the period of the Cold War, has been attracting new research, partly due to its increasing geo-political and economic significance.[7]

If the social worlds that we study are interconnected with a variety of social worlds elsewhere, this connectivity, as the very basis of social life and people's experience, generates from the outset a set of concerns regarding the interplay between considerations about »mobility« and the question of »agency«. Mobility, the ability to move, here means the *potential ways of moving* that lead to changing locations and patterns of living, which may or may not belong to the same social worlds or networks.[8] Agency, in relation to this notion, is the set of potential actions that individuals and groups aspire to and are capable of (*Handlungsvermögen*).[9] The notions of »mobility« and »agency« create a conceptual bracket within which we think through some fundamental research questions on the movement (or non-movement) of »translocal actors« as well as their motivations and strategies for doing so.

In our research, the term »translocal actors,«[10] an expression which combines aspects of agency and mobility, does not apply exclusively to those »people on the move« such as pilgrims, missionaries, merchants, scholars, soldiers, sailors and refugees.[11] In other words, we do not think of mobility exclusively in a physical sense of actual movement only but also as imagined mobility, that is the wish, the dream, the hope and aspiration to be elsewhere, namely to move.[12] And, following from this consideration, what is commonly seen as »immobility« is looked at here as a constitutive analytical part of mobility itself. Against this background, we understand »agency« as what people do, and / or aspire to do, within the specific contexts marking what is possible or »in reach« for them, in each particular case. This is related to Marx's formulation of the tension between human agency and the social and historical constraints within which humans act: human beings make history, but not according to circumstances of their own choosing.[13] Agency cannot, under the above described conditions of basic connectivity, be separated from mobility, the ability to move, as a driving force and pathway for the realisation of aspirations that social actors may have, wherever they live.

5 Jan-Georg Deutsch and Brigitte Reinwald (eds.), *Space on the Move. Transformations of the Indian Ocean Seascape in the 19th and 20th Century*, Berlin 2002; Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut*: Reforming the Homeland, Leiden 2003; Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (eds.), *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, London 2007.

6 On the latter, especially Chanfi Ahmed's »For the Saudi's Kingdom or for the Umma? Global 'Ulamā' in the Dār al-Hadīth in Medina« in *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 32 (2012), 70-90; Elisabeth Boesen, Laurence Marfaing (eds.), *Les nouveaux urbains dans l'espace Sahara-Sahel. Un cosmopolitisme par le bas*, Paris 2007.

7 Erhard Krume and Vitali Naumkin: *Pjatnadzat let, kotorye izmenili centralnuju Aziju (1991-2006)*, Moskva 2006; Michael Kemperer and Stephan Conermann (eds.), *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies,* London 2011; Matthias Schmidt, »(K)ein Ende der Transformation: Zentralasien zwischen Postsozialismus und Globalisierung«, *Geographische Rundschau* 65, 11 (2013), 4-10.

8 For a discussion of mobility, see for instance: Knut Graw and Samuli Schielke, *The Global Horizon: Expectations of Migration in Africa and the Middle East*, Leuven 2012. This edited volume is based on the papers given at a workshop entitled »Migration at Home and Imaginary Cosmopolitanism«, held at ZMO in March 2009. Steven Vertovec, *Anthropology of Migration and Multiculturalism: New Directions*, London 2010; John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century*, London 2000.

9 For the debate on agency, see for instance: Alexej N. Leontjew, *Tätigkeit, Bewußtsein, Persönlichkeit*, Köln 1982; Michel DeCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1984; Hans Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, Chicago 1996; Harald Fischer-Tiné (ed.), *Handeln und Verhandeln. Kolonialismus, transkulturelle Prozesse und Handlungskompetenz*,. Hamburg 2002.

10 If, according to Freitag / von Oppen, translocality »designated the outcome of concrete movements of people, goods, ideas and symbols which span spatial distances and cross boundaries, be they geographical, cultural or political«, then, applied to actors, it is the processes of these movements of people and the implications for their life and actions we are looking at. Rather than applying it to a place we apply it to the people creating and doing translocal living. Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, »Introduction. ›Translocality‹: An approach to Connection and Transfer in Area Studies«, in Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen (eds.). *Translocality. The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, Leiden 2010, 3.

11 For useful examples, see: Brigitte Reinwald, *Reisen durch den Krieg: Erfahrungen und Lebensstrategien westafrikanischer Weltkriegsveteranen der französischen Kolonialarmee*, ZMO Studien 18, Berlin 2005; Anne K. Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860-1925*, London 2003; Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama*, Cambridge et al. 2000; Liisa Helena Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago 1995.

12 Within the limited frame of this paper we do not look explicitly at forms of social mobility. Mobility here is always associated with a (real or imagined) movement between geographical places which of course have social reasons and implications.

13 To paraphrase Karl Marx' famous saying: »Die Menschen machen ihre eigene Geschichte, aber sie machen sie nicht aus freien Stücken, nicht unter selbst gewählten, sondern unter unmittelbar vorgefundenen, gegebenen und überlieferten Umständen.« Karl Marx, »Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte«, *MEW* 8, 115.

Today, »mobility« (with its kin-terms of movement and migration) and »agency« (linked to social actors, their perspectives and their lives) each mark a field of investigation and discussion within the humanities and social sciences of a size that is not just considerable, but almost overwhelming. By no means do we want to provide a comprehensive discussion of these fields, nor an overview of the latest research within them. What we attempt here is to present some basic insights into these terms and their interrelation with the concrete aim of conceptualising translocal actors from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The individuals and groups we are looking at are often originating from or embedded in an »Islamicate World«. They may consciously hold and ascribe to themselves »religious« attitudes and motivations. Thus, we consider the place of »religion« vis-à-vis other motivations and regulatory aspects of social life, next to and apart from other sources of strength and resilience and within other criteria of establishing networks and acquiring knowledge. We try to establish and work with a perspective on Muslim actors (or actors in social contexts significantly influenced by interpretations of Islam), a framework that does not apply exclusively with respect to Muslims but regards all social actors on equal analytical terms.

This paper addresses the effects of translocal and global processes on people in Muslim worlds from the perspectives of three different analytical levels related to the everyday lives and social practices of people. In the first part we explore how specific *forms and strategies of mobility or immobility* are created due to power relations and obstructing and facilitating factors. In the second part we discuss how questions of longing are related to the agency of translocal actors by looking at their integration in social *networks, families and localities*. The last part deals with the implications of different patterns of moving for the *acquisition, distribution and social materialisation of knowledge* by translocal actors.

Mobility and immobility – obstructive and facilitating factors

When exploring and interrogating Muslim worlds, one has to consider that mobility is already implicit in Islamic practice and some of its commands or norms. Pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), if possible, is among the five basic pillars applying to all Muslims. Travelling itself is seen as a recommendable action, especially when it is taken for the sake of acquiring knowledge (*rihla*). In addition, the »obligation to migrate«[14] is part of a normative corpus for Muslims who live in particular social and cultural circumstances that obstruct them from living according to their valid interpretations of religious guidelines, notably among a non-Muslim majority; thus they are compelled to migrate (to perform *hijra*). Indeed, the notion of the Muslim *umma*, the global community of believers, builds on a sense of the general basic connectivity of all Muslims, thus implying mobility. It is dynamic in that its spread and the reach of its diverse internal networks continue to be developed, in the sense that they continue to be generated, but also degenerated and regenerated. The *umma* is, through the assumption of basic connectivity that anticipates the possibility of all Muslims meeting up and interacting (in Mecca, but also elsewhere), a *global* »imagined community«. This is »re-imagined« throughout the history of Islam, which can mean re-connecting with some regions while dis-connecting with others in the social visions of unity (for connectivity does not imply factual long-term connectedness). These processes take multiple forms, relative to the movements and migrations of various Muslim peoples from different regions. These again relate back to the respective political and economic dynamics, and the status (and needs and aspirations) of Muslim groups and individuals within the wider world – sometimes explicitly »as Muslims«, often not.[15]

Given that there are certain normative demands and expectations concerning mobility and actual movement that are part of Islam itself, we should of course not consider all kinds of movement by Muslims as religiously motivated, as demanded or commended by Islam, as exclusively Islamic. This may apply even in the case of the examples mentioned in the previous paragraph. Many other forms of movements are also undertaken by Muslims, while many other reasons for moving matter to them, in the more general sense of Muslims as

14 Muhammad Khalid Masud, »The Obligation to Migrate: The Doctrine of Hijra in Islamic Law«, in Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (eds.), *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, London 1990, 29-49.

15 On »imagined community«, see: Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London et al. 1991; on »re-imagining the umma« and the formation of (recent) transnational Islam (in the West), see: Peter G. Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*, London et al. 2001; on political and educational reformations of the umma, see: Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, New York 2004; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam. Custodians of Change*, Princeton 2002. This implicit reckoning with global mobility has partly been worked through and discussed in historical works (e.g. F. E. Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*, Princeton et al. 1994. Also, the importance of Islamic networks connecting different groups of Muslims across the globe through time and space has been covered (e.g. Roman Loimeier, *Die islamische Welt als Netzwerk: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Netzwerkanalye im islamischen Kontext*, Würzburg 2000). For our purposes here, we keep the specific demands for and the pronounced approval of mobility within the Muslim world in mind, and we will flag up these conditions where they matter specifically, e.g. in contrast or comparison to other contexts and religions.

translocal actors. Of course, other religions also have integrated forms of movement into their normative frameworks: pilgrimage, for one, is a common element in many religions, most prominently in Christianity and Hinduism.[16] Among scholars of Islam such prescribed and recommended movements are often analysed as social actions that have religious as well as non-religious implications which change over time and space due to social, political, and economic circumstances.[17]

In a world of ever-faster globalising markets and communication structures, the movements of people through trade or labour migrations, religious missions, or educational travels have affected the life-worlds of more and more individuals, families and social groups ever more strongly. The reasons and motivations why some people actually move and others do not often constitute a complex blend of economic reasons, political and religious hopes, constraints and obligations, or simple adventurism and a yearning to know the world. People hope, and are motivated and inspired, to be in contact, exchange and communication with places and people elsewhere that they know of or are affected by – whether by means of economic exchange, political domination, or religious affiliation. The actual realisation of movement, as anticipated by the respective social actors, however, again depends on a variety of factors, most importantly perhaps the political and legal conditions, the material resources, and the social contacts and networks that people have access to.

Whether people actually move – and in the final instance migrate, create diasporas or stay in exile, or travel back and forth regularly – does not, analytically speaking, really matter more than the basic constellations on the ground that infuse, shape, alter and transform people's hopes, wishes, needs or decisions to move, to actually go elsewhere or not. In other words, if mobility constitutes patterns and processes of movement in space, these patterns and processes can analytically just as well be looked at through the prism of immobility. Immobility can mark the beginning and end-point of migratory processes (if and when these can be clearly identified). It can also become one of various stages in the process of a migratory movement. Immobility at home, feeling »stuck«, or being truly unable to move (economically, socially or politically), may provide the initial driving force for moving away. For many, however, the actual move may never happen, due to scarcity of resources (or support), or lack of confidence, infrastructure or opportunity.[18] Indeed, this has been shown for potential, aspiring and some actual migrants to Europe from Senegal and Egypt, where the narratives of frustration and / or despair at home and those of the hope to migrate to Europe have been captured and documented. How distant places of promise are imagined – notably »Europe« from afar – in relation to the known perils (and securities) of one's home or current location fundamentally affects how decisions about moving or leaving are made, and indeed about how lives are lead overall. Decisions and the judgements on which they are based are, of course, fallible. They might have been miscalculated or have left aside important factors, as a result of »wishful thinking«. Yet the decisions and their outcomes in the paths of lives that are continued are irreversible. They accumulate and become part of people's life experiences. This is why it is important to see that the process of migration can begin before any actual visible movement itself, in the minds and imaginations of the people concerned.[19] Whether these experiences are made »at home« or »away« has repercussions for the ways they are lived through, expressed and generally dealt with by social actors, and how the consequences of and reactions to these experiences play out and are contextualised in the respective social environments or life-worlds.

As Graw and Schielke emphasise in the introduction to their volume on the expectations of migration in African contexts:

»In order to understand why and how people become migrants, (...) it is important not only to look at people who in various ways have moved between places, but also those who have not yet become migrants, are in the process of becoming migrants, or never will become migrants at all.«[20]

We can only aspire to obtain a full picture of migration stories and histories when we include the prepared and aspiring migrants who did not move, as opposed to focusing solely on at least those who did happen to migrate, often more by manner of

16 For a discussion of pilgrimage in Christianity see for instance: Jas Elsner and Ian Rutherford (eds.), *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman & Early Christian Antiquity, Seeing the Gods*, Oxford, New York 2005; one recent publication on pilgrimage in the context of Hinduism is: James G. Lochtefeld, *God's Gateway. Identity and Meaning in a Hindu Pilgrimage Place Identity*, Oxford 2010.

17 Cf. Eickelman / Piscatori, *Muslim Travellers*, xii, 16.

18 Methodologically, this is very difficult to cover and observe for researchers, but it can be worked upon on the basis of long-term fieldwork and resultant longer-term relationships based on mutual trust. For instance, Graw, Gaibazzi and Schielke have been able to consult in depth with friends and informants from their original fieldwork sites (in West Africa and Egypt, respectively) about their experiences in their new surroundings (in Spain, Italy, and the Gulf).

19 See: Graw / Schielke, *The Global Horizon*. On the formation and formulation of »Intent«, see: Knut Graw, »Beyond Expertise: Specialist Agency and the Autonomy of the Divinatory Ritual Process«, in *Africa* 79, 1 (2009), 92-109 (Special issue on »Expertise and the Transmission of Knowledge«, ed. by Trevor Marchand and Kai Kresse).

20 Knut Graw and Samuli Schielke, »Introduction: Reflections on expectations in Africa and Beyond«, in Graw / Schielke (eds.), *The Global Horizon*, 7-22, here 10.

chance and coincidence than by will or desire. In order to carve out the »subjective aspects of migration«, it makes sense to trace how people employ their imagination and practical skills in order to try and match their hopes and expectations with experiences. Working on West African Muslim aspirant migrants who have stayed at home until now, Paolo Gaibazzi has argued that immobility may not be passive. In fact, having the patience and mental balance, as some of these young men do, to wait for the right and proper time to move successfully can be seen as a true virtue. In this instance, God may well provide a point of departure through an un-anticipated opportunity. As such, »God's time is the best«, is a common and telling statement among these youths while waiting, particularly in the face of unsuccessful, hazardous or rushed attempts to migrate to Europe from there.[21]

Immobility also commonly marks people in exile (as they are unable or unwilling to return home), but viewed from their homelands it is often they who appear mobile. South Asian intellectuals and revolutionaries (Muslims and Hindus), for instance, who happened to be in Berlin at the beginning of the First World War often were not allowed to return to India until the 1930s. They had once left India for different reasons, some of them for the sake of education, some due to political reasons or economic motivations. As British colonial subjects, they became »enemies« of Germany with the outbreak of the war. A group of South Asian intellectuals in Berlin founded the *Berlin Indian Independence Committee* and cooperated with the German Foreign Office in its anti-British and pan-Islamic activities.[22] When the war was over, they – now suspect individuals in the eyes of the British Empire – were not allowed to return to India and found themselves in a situation of imposed exile. Immobility (or strictly controlled mobility) for them was not an accepted situation but a continuous hindrance and a fundamental challenge to the mobility they aimed for. As such an unavoidable given fact of their situation, it was strategically incorporated and employed in their anti-colonial, nationalist and international political activities.[23]

Considerable analytical insight can be generated by a comparison of this situation of exile with the challenges faced by groups of West African *ulama* when performing *hijra* to Mecca and Medina in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In reaction to the colonial conquest of their regions by England and France, these *ulama* felt the necessity to leave their places of origin (according to the Islamic obligation of *hijra)*. Because of the ongoing colonial occupation of their homelands, they did not return, but stayed either in Mecca and Medina, or on the way to the supposed final destination, where they founded a West African diaspora. Having settled, some contributed significantly to the development of education in the region in general and to the spread of Islamic education in particular (in this case the teachings of the Wahhabi variant of Islam), using their existing networks and establishing new ones.[24]

What do these two historical examples show us with regard to the analytic link between mobility and agency? Analysing both non-movement as well as movement through the lens of mobility (as the ability to move) requires taking seriously the relevant dimensions of agency applicable to the social actors that are studied in their respective translocal scenarios. This framework for comparison provides a greater sense of complexity and nuance. Clearly, in the two cases outlined above, the common simple notions of *exile* and *hijra* – according to which *exile* denotes a (static) situation people find themselves in, and *hijra* a process or a movement that people perform – do not do justice to the complex processes at work here. The examples illustrate that the phenomenon of *exile* cannot be regarded as exclusively (or perhaps even predominantly) passive – as in »being exiled« – nor can *hijra* be seen as an exclusively active phenomenon – as in »performing *hijra*« – contrary to what the linguistic expressions seem to suggest.[25] Taking the actors' perspective seriously, we can see that both are differently accentuated forms or patterns of mobility and agency between-times and between-spaces. Both concepts express an embeddedness of social actors that is defined by translocal settings that imply meaningful reference to (and thus link up with) other connected settings.

21 Paolo Gaibazzi, »›God's Time is the Best‹: Religious Imagination and the Wait for Emigration in The Gambia«, in Graw / Schielke (eds.), *The Global Horizon*, 121-136.

22 Heike Liebau, »The German Foreign Office, Indian Emigrants and Propaganda Efforts Among the ›Sepoys‹«, in Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau and Ravi Ahuja (eds.), *»When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings«: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, New Delhi 2011, 96-129.

23 Benjamin Zachariah, »Internationalisms in the Interwar Years: The Travelling of Ideas«, paper presented at the ECMSAS Bonn, July 2010; Benjamin Zachariah, »A Long, Strange Trip: The Lives in Exile of Har Dayal«, S*outh Asian History and Culture* 4 (2013), 574-592.

24 Chanfi Ahmed, »For the Saudi´s Kingdom«. For West African Diasporas, see also: C. Bawa Yamba, *Permanent Pilgrims: The Role of Pilgrimage in the Lives of West African Muslims in Sudan*, Edinburgh 1995.

25 For a theoretical discussion of the concept of exile see: Michael Matthiesen, Tim B. Müller and Martial Staub (eds.), [special issue] »Exil«, *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* 2, 1 (2008). While stating that exile is »keine selbstbestimmte Lebensform« and describing the complex life paths of exiled peoples, the authors highlight the exiled peoples' participation in and contributions to political history in different times and thus argue for a new understanding of the concept of exile.

The actors' related sentiments of attachment and belonging – linked to »home«, places of origin, family, and other social networks. Both *exile* and *hijra* imply the idea of a journey (taken, planned or prescribed), and are often associated with migration or displacement, with situations of being »out of place«, »arriving« (both can become extended periods »in limbo«) as well as moments or periods of »belonging«. These kinds of dynamics might play a pronounced and characteristic role for diaspora situations as well, which frequently exist in Muslim Worlds.[26]

As such moments, instances and situations always emerge out of, and connect back to, the experiences of specific people (whether we call them individuals or not), we also argue strongly in favour of biographical research. This allows us, as researchers, to zoom in on the senses of longing and belonging that people have. Recent research in history and in anthropology shows that the use of biographical methods makes possible the exploration of microhistories in order to do gain fresh insights on historical and contemporary global phenomena.[27] Biographical methods pursue an actor's perspective and may therefore be able to document the complexities of people's lives through the ways of their own decision-making and interpretation processes at some given time (often, of course, narrated from a later point in time).

Longing and belonging - networks and localities

In the beginning of this paper we argued that mobility can lead the individuals and groups we are looking at to change locations and/or patterns of living. These new locations and patterns of living may or may not belong to the same social worlds or networks they originated from or had lived in earlier. Consequently, mobility also leads to changes in the respective frames and possibilities of action (*Handlungsrahmen, Handlungsmöglichkeiten*) people have, both with regard to the places they live in and the social networks they belong to. Specific social, historical and cultural features or constellations which members of particular groups shared among them – as residents of cities, villages or regions, or as members of linguistic communities, ethnic groups, or specialised networks, for instance of trade, scholarship or religion – may lose significance or obtain a different meaning when people move. This applies, for instance, to the Omani Ibadhi migrants on the East African coast among whom many became Shafii, following a long-term period of living among (and partly intermarrying with) local Shafii Muslims. A related example from outside the Muslim world is provided by the observation that the social conceptions and related practices of »caste« took on different meanings after some time abroad among some Hindu groups who migrated from Western India across the Indian Ocean to East Africa.[28]

In addition, only some members or proportions of the groups concerned move, and they move away and only partly return while others do not. Thus a clear-cut separation of the groups studied is not always possible: we cannot easily divide them up into those who have moved away from the previously shared location and/or socio-political environment and those who have not. Moreover, the groups' actual and ongoing connectedness continues in the experience of social actors despite a loss of direct or immediate physical unity and cohesion. In other words, there exist strands of social continuity, despite disunity (or disintegration), through basic connectivity.

Thus, as Paolo Gaibazzi has shown for the context of Soninke youth in the Gambia, people staying behind, who cannot or do not make use of their potential mobility, may very well be considered as translocal actors. As mentioned above, these youths' decisions to stay may be just as much affected by the overall translocal scenario within which they are socially situated. This overall translocal scenario provides them with the connections and resources to craft sedentary trajectories, and to sustain mobility and translocal activities from home.[29]

For historians and anthropologists, it is difficult to find out what it means for people to be »at home« or »away from home«, to feel a sense of longing, belonging or being lost (whether at home or away). Assuming that their sense of self is shaped by their

26 See for instance: Leif O. Manger, *The Hadrami Diaspora: Community Building in the Indian Ocean Rim*, New York 2010.

27 Angela Woollacott, Desley Deacon and Penny Russell, (eds.), *Transnational Lives. Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-Present,* New York 2010; David Lambert and Alan Lester (eds.), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire. Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge 2006; Bernd Hausberger, (ed.), *Globale Lebensläufe. Menschen als Akteure im weltgeschichtlichen Geschehen*, Wien 2006; Tony Balatyne and Antoinette Burton (eds.), *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire*, Urbana, IL, 2008; For the field of anthropology see for instance: Pat Caplan, *African Voices, African Lives: Personal Narratives from a Swahili Village*, London 1998; Dale Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Marocco*, Princeton 1993; Richard Werbner, *Tears of the Dead: The Social Biography of an African Family,* Edinburgh 1991; Mukulika Banerjee, *Muslim Portraits: Everyday Lives in India,* Bloomington 2008.

28 This was observed by anthropologist David Pocock, who worked on both littorals in the 1960s and 1970s; see: Kai Kresse and Edward Simpson, »Between Africa and India: Thinking Comparatively Across the Western Indian Ocean«, *ZMO Working Papers* 5 (2011), 10-12, http://www.zmo.de/publikationen/WorkingPapers/kresse_simpson2011.pdf (accessed 30.12.2013).

29 Paolo Gaibazzi, »Home as Transit: Would-Be Migrants and Immobility in Gambia«, in Jocelyne Streiff-Fénart and Aurelia Wa Kabwe Segatti (eds.), *The Challenge of the Threshold: Border Closures and Migration in Africa*, Lanham Md. et al. 2012, 163-176.

respective connection or disconnection to a locality of origin, both in terms of their individual life histories and experiences and in terms of group dynamics, the researcher has to look sensitively at the relationship between the newly built second »homes« away from home and the »original home«. For instance, sailors, captains, and merchants along different parts of the Indian Ocean littorals often had additional bases, partners and even households and recognised families in the other port-towns they regularly frequented and stayed in for extended periods of time.[30] The idea of home can become a kind of driving force (to provide for, or return to), or a source of consolation (standing for safety, security and social warmth). Here we may think of many Muslims living in the West returning to their homeland regularly for the month of Ramadan. But »home« can also, in contrast, become a matter of constraint and a source of worry or fear, depending on the social and political conditions and the position and intentions of the actors within them. This would apply, for instance, to outspoken and politically engaged intellectuals who had to leave their home countries or live in fear after a climate of dominant and exclusive Islamic revivalism had been established (e.g. the Sudanese Abdulahi Ahmed An-Naim and others in Egypt during the 1990s).

As we have argued earlier in this paper, the force of imagination plays a major role in motivating people, comforting them and guiding them, whether they are actually moving or willing or able to move or not. Religion and Islam, in particular, may feed into that imagination and thus into coining one's own sense of belonging, or into holding a sense of community within a social group together, even if that group is diminishing and challenged by surrounding demography and social contexts. Here one might think of the Khojas or Bohoras in East Africa as examples. And while imagination itself cannot be directly accessed, studied and analysed by researchers, the workings and effects of imagination can be observable, as factors that motivate or constrain the actions that we see or read about. Evidently, however, taking imagination seriously does not mean that the impact of external factors should be neglected in any way. As such, it does not require abandoning an analysis of the state and other political dynamics, or law and legal frameworks that prescribe guidelines for people's actions.[31]

Dealing with translocal actors, historians can use their sources to reconstruct affiliations, ties, connections, lines of communication and so on, in order to interpret the existence or absence of feelings of belonging or »being at home«.[32] Chanfi Ahmed has argued that the West African *ulama* in the Hejaz (mentioned above) depended to a great extent on family support throughout their journey from West Africa to Mecca and Medina. They were well received by relatives living in the countries they passed who were already part of the West African diaspora. In the process of creating their place of living in Mecca and Medina, they established new religious networks and cooperated with Arab *ulama* and others from South Asia within their new places of living.[33] The case of the South Asian intellectuals and revolutionaries in Berlin during the First World War (also mentioned above) is different in the sense that, in order to create a (partly conspiratorial) political network aimed at supporting the anti-British and national struggle outside India, they used existing connections within a South Asian community in Europe as well as in North America. Here family ties as well as religious ones were (at least temporarily) subordinated to actual political demands.[34] In both cases, »home« probably has to be understood as a mental construct related to time and space and shaped by memory, experience, hope and imagination, rather than being associated with a concrete geographical locality in the first instance.[35] Religious aspects are an important element of this construct of belonging in the first example, whereas in the second they could become instrumental, to be subordinated under more pressing political demands, considerations and goals.

Of the majority of contemporary labour migrants, however, researchers can ask similar questions. How do people make do with what they have, whether in familiar or unfamiliar environments, to create a place and a social space in which to live? And does this mean they belong? How do they lead their daily lives, especially among or next to people they hardly know, some of whom may reject them? What kind of creativity do people use and develop within the social situations in which

30 See e.g.: Abdul Sheriff, describing the case of people from the Omani port of Sur, Abdul Sherrif, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce, and Islam,* London 2010, 53-61.

31 Especially, as related to the history of Islam, see: Michael Cook, *Forbidding wrong in Islam: An Introduction*, New York 2003.

32 For the debate on history of emotions see: Ute Frevert, »Was haben Gefühle in der Geschichte zu suchen?«, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35, 2 (2009), 183-208. Margrit Pernau, »An ihren Gefühlen sollt ihr sie erkennen», *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35, 2 (2009), 249-281.

33 Ahmed, »For the Saudi´s Kingdom«.

34 Liebau, »The German Foreign Office«; Zachariah, »A Long, Strange Trip«.

35 This relates to the point about social spaces as processes which are created and changed permanently by social actors; see: Katharina Lange, Sebastian R. Prange and Nitin Sinha, »Reflecting on ›Muslim Worlds – World of Islam?‹ from a spatial perspective«, *ZMO Programmatic Texts* 7 (2013), http://d-nb.info/1045799513/34 (accessed 30.12.2013).

they live and move, and what leads creativity to a breakdown, to paralysis? Religion, of course, and Islam and its diverse sub-groups in particular, can provide a whole host of mediating and unifying, as well as differentiating, alienating and obstructive factors for such scenarios of internally diverse migrant communities.

Scholars have argued that family needs, demands, obligations and expectations might be a reason for movement, as family can act as both, a support and reference-point as well as a beneficiary. Old family structures at home are reconstructed, rebuilt and extended in the host society.[36] While moving or after having moved, most people try to keep family ties alive even if the family lives far away and there are few possibilities to visit each other. Often families remain in the background in a corrective, advisory or directive role for the decisions made by migrant relatives about actions taken far away from home. Migrants tend to ask themselves whether what they do would be appreciated by the family or not, whether it would help or harm the family back home. Contemporary migrants sometimes try to move with their whole families, settling elsewhere together. But often economic and political conditions allow only one person to migrate. This individual then tries to materially support the families from abroad, and possibly bring them over to follow after a while. Migrants use their contacts and networks to organise the migration process, and establish further networks among relatives and fellow countrymen in the places of destination.

These family-based contacts and networks may often also be organised around or include aspects of religious orientation. Being a member of a certain branch of Sufism, for instance, like the Murid trade diaspora with their globally spread community and successful trade-orientation, provides ready channels to move between West Africa, North America, East Asia and Europe.[37] Otherwise, recent research shows that new approaches to »Islamic networks«, which have so far been studied as predominantly religious networks of worship, may throw new light on social history. This holds true for the networks of the *Üsküdar Özbekler Tekkesi* lodge in Istanbul. Whereas *tekkes* (place to welcome and support pilgrims) have been studied earlier as places of worship, Lale Can shows their wider range of functions and the interrelationship between religious and secular network functions and thus provides new insights into the social history of connections between the Ottoman Empire and Central Asia.[38]

Network-based structures in which religion does not play a role in the first instance can be observed among contemporary economic migrants from Egypt or South Asia working in the Gulf.[39] Here, Muslims of very different backgrounds and partly oppositional interpretations of Islam come together in this territory and on the terms of wealthy and pronounced hierarchical host societies in an uneasy social mix. This applies similarly to migrant workers coming from Central Asia to Russia. Markets and the infrastructure of Central Asian traders in Moscow depend on the functioning connections to their fellow countrymen and kin based in Moscow, as well as on active connections to their homes in Central Asia. Therefore, family ties and networks, which may often be infused or underpinned by religious affiliation, play a central role in simultaneously constituting both the (morally) supportive background and the (material) reason and demand for migration.[40]

The translocal actors we look at move through time and space with their geographic *and* biographic backgrounds,[41] thereby carrying old and developing new social ties in order to create a (sometimes temporary) home away from home. Contacts are established, activated, kept or interrupted in different situations, processes and circumstances, and social networks are developed and used at a particular time and place with specific intentions. But despite these changing localities and social networks, group members who leave and those who stay (or move to a different place) do remain part of a historically and socially connected community, even if in terms of shared space-in-time this has been broken up (whether for shorter or longer periods).[42] The links of belonging that people experience in concrete actions or emo-

36 Maritsa Poros, *Modern Migrations: Gujarati Indian Networks in New York and London*, Palo Alto 2010.

37 Mamadou Diouf, »The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism«, in C. A. Breckenridge et al. (eds.), *Cosmopolitanism,* Durham 2003, 111-137.

38 Lale Can, »Connecting People: A Central Asian Sufi Network in Turn-Of-The Century Istanbul«, *Modern Asian Studies*, 46, 2 (2012) , 373-401.

39 See: Samuli Schielke, »Engaging the World on the Alexandria Waterfront«, in Graw / Schielke (eds.), *The Global Horizon*, 175-191; Andrew Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*, New York 2010; Filippo Osella and Katy Gardner, *Migration, Modernity, and Social Transformation in South Asia*, New Delhi 2004.

40 Marléne Laruelle, »Central Asian Labor Migrants in Russia. The Diasporization of Central Asian States?«, *China and Eurasian Forum Quarterly*, 5, 3 (2007), 101-119.

41 Theano S. Terkenli, »The Place of Everyday Life Geographies in the Production and Practice of Reproduction and Practice of Cultural Difference in a Globalizing World«, *www.art-omma.org*. 5 (2001), http://www.art-omma.org/issue5/text/terkeli.htm (accessed 09.09.2011). Bernd Hausberger highlights the importance of historical biographical research for the research on global history. Bernd Hausberger (ed.), *Globale Lebensläufe*, 11-13.

42 Poros, *Modern Migrations;* Julia Verne, *Living translocality: Space, Culture and Economy in Contemporary Swahili Trade,* Stuttgart 2012.

tions, which are very difficult to observe directly (like feelings of personal loss, homesickness, depression, but also elation, joy or satisfaction), also constitute empirical evidence for the social researcher. This testifies not least to the ongoing relevance of these kinds of social connections that people continue to have, and yet have had to, or have wanted to see, cut.

Mobility and knowledge: travelling ideas and mobilising knowledge

How are skills and the kinds of knowledge that people acquire, employ and retain (both as products and prerequisites of their actions) connected to and shaped by mobility; and how do they, in turn, shape it? Ideas and knowledge become meaningful through the people who need them, who apply, change and challenge them. In the last part of this paper we assess mechanisms at work and conditions which influence processes of the production, implementation and popularisation of knowledge through actors in translocal spaces.

In order to clarify this, we need to return to the realm of »imagination«, as a mediating locus in which this happens, as well as a kind of facilitating creative force *through* which it does so. Indeed, in relation to people's particular experiences, their imagination links their emerging hopes and aspirations for the future with certain forms of knowledge and skills acquired in the past. In other words, imagination thus provides links and visions of other places located elsewhere as »sites of possibility« for one's own actions, within a »horizon« of potential experience that actors can see themselves approaching or becoming involved in.[43] Such a hermeneutically inspired approach provides a useful axis of analysis as it connects deliberations about past experiences that inform present hopes and aspirations with an assessment of potential future outcomes. Decision-making about the exercise of mobility involves the creative use of one's imagination as part of complex overall considerations about one's current circumstances in relation to an anticipated perspective elsewhere. Knowledge and skills acquired through previous experiences feed into the shaping of one's imagination (defining frame and focus), while also determining the kinds of visions of possible and potential future sites and locations of living, and the realisation of getting there. In parallel, new experiences are constantly made by translocal actors (whether actively sought or through exposure), and correlative kinds of knowledge and skills are gained and acquired. These (again) feed into a dynamic vision of reality, thus potentially stimulating or further endorsing the aspirations to move that are held or nourished by social actors.

Generally speaking, social agency is shaped by experience and associated abilities, the knowledge and skills that people acquire throughout their lives. In this regard, religion may play a significant role, among other aspects, depending on the specific agents and societies we are looking at. Seeking to understand the agency of translocal actors we have to build on, but also go beyond, the investigation of material conditions, social networks and constraints affecting people's lives. As such, we argue for the inclusion of ideas, knowledge and world-views with which these social actors are living, travelling and acting, as part of a wider realm of their imagination of which religion is also part.[44] Now, if it seems to be comparatively easy for social scientists to follow or reconstruct the physical movements of social actors or the flows of goods, it is far more difficult to follow or account for the the movement and flows of ideas and knowledge.

Nonetheless, we can follow such movements and flows through a study of religious and educational networks (which historically often intersect with family and trading ones). For the Indian Ocean region, for instance, this has been approached from a number of thematic angles, and for a variety of networks and groups.[45] The colonial acceleration and intensification of connectivity and communication, through relevant technologies and imperial policies (of division and expansion, not least through wars), has linked up markets and lifeworlds across regions ever more closely. For the people affected, aspects of religious orientation intersect with different forms of knowledge and practice, which may make it difficult (or impossible) to clearly disentangle »religious« from other forms of social life.[46] We also find similarly struc-

43 Graw / Schielke, »Introduction«.

44 For the idea of popularising knowledge see: Bettina Gräf, *Medien-Fatwas@Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Die Popularisierung des islamischen Rechts*, ZMO Studien 27, Berlin 2010, especially 28-34.

45 Here the cultivation, development and maintenance of religious education and scholarship often overlaps with, and draws from, networks of kinship and trade. For the Hadhramis, see e.g.: Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean*, Berkeley 2006; Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*. Thematically, for instance, forms of Islamic prayer across the ocean and ritual practices of the Gujarat-based »Siddis« of African origin (e.g. Basu 2007) have been investigated. See for instance: David J. Parkin and Stephen Cavana Headley, *Islamic Prayer Across the Indian Ocean: Inside and Outside the Mosque*, Corzon 2000; Helene Basu, »Drumming and Praying: Sidi at the Interface between Spirit Possession and Islam«, in Kresse / Simpson, 291-321.

46 For instance, a pronounced »Hindu« nationalist agenda, claiming opportunity for a »Greater India«, fed into the labour migration from Bombay to East Africa on a motivational level for migrants themselves, as well as on the level of political administration. See: Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections, India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920*, Berkeley 2008. And in the colonially administered

tured scenarios related to other regions of bridgehead connectivity. In Central Asia, for example, institutions and practices mediate and disseminate »Islamic« and other forms of knowledge, affiliation and identification.

In her study of the foreign impact on the renewal of Islam in Kazakhstan in the late 1990s early 2000s, Dina Wilkowsky highlights Kazakhs wishing to go to Turkey, Pakistan or to Arab countries for a special Islamic education. Young Kazakh Muslims, especially from rural areas, went abroad because of both the absence of respective institutions in Kazakhstan and the potential for special (financial) offers from these countries. Many graduates of foreign Madrasas later became important actors in the processes of Islamic renaissance in Kazakhstan, which have been characterised by conflictual encounters between external influences and internal developments.[47]

Assuming that translocal actors obtain, carry, produce and distribute specialised and everyday knowledge, as well as political, religious and scientific ideas in different cultural contexts, they are involved in processes of mobilising and popularising this knowledge. Within these processes both the ideas and forms of knowledge change, as well as the actors who live and travel with them. If, as Jackson argues, »the knowledge whereby one lives is not necessarily identical with the knowledge whereby one explains life«,[48] we need to be clear about what »knowledge« means in particular situations and for particular actors. As researchers, this enables us to follow the movement of knowledge. Knowledge (including skills, education, learning) becomes meaningful through the use of the people who need and apply it, and who transform and challenge it through their thinking and through their practical actions. The knowledge actors perceive as necessary for their daily lives might be different from the knowledge they require for their (personal) life strategies and different from what they think would be necessary for the wider world. Thus, there would always be different motives and needs to obtain certain kinds of knowledge, or even »certain knowledge« (after Lambek[49]), in particular situations when seeking authoritative guidance on what is right and wrong.

The conscious acquisition of knowledge combined with translocal experience can become the basis for social, political and religious commitment. This can be observed, for instance, in the case of Ottoman students who, in 19th century, went to Switzerland to acquire knowledge about Europe. Leading Ottoman intellectuals had propagated the idea to study in Europe and to gain knowledge there in order to strengthen the Ottoman state. Following their call, students went away in order to learn, and then to return and contribute to social reforms back home. The knowledge they were supposed to acquire was taken to be a »universal commodity« although the travel to Europe in order to gain this knowledge was justified in religious terms.[50]

How religious knowledge could survive over time, despite political and legal constraints, can be observed in certain regions of the former Soviet Union, especially in Central Asia. Restrictions on religious institutions throughout the Soviet period pushed people to take alternative paths to acquire and disseminate religious knowledge. Islamic knowledge and education were integrated into life-cycle rituals and thus performed throughout the Soviet period in families and localities despite the anti-religious stance of the state. In this way, they survived as part of popular practice. In the post-Soviet period, some religious scholars have consciously identified this as an intellectual tradition and have in turn become very influential among the young generation. This younger generation, in a society long dominated by the prescribed abstinence from explicit religious activity, are somewhat eager to display Islamic knowledge and values.[51]

Knowledge is always part of communication, mutual engagement and concern within a social community where, as information or a normative guideline, it is shared, passed on and employed to practical effect. This is explicitly demanded within those Muslim communities where the acquisition

sultanate of Zanzibar, the adaptation of iconographic items of western »modernity« in public life went together with forms of pronounced consciousness of Muslim and Arab identity. See: Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*; Roman Loimeier, *Eine Zeitlandschaft in der Globalisierung. Das islamische Sansibar im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2012.

47 Dina Wilkowsky, *Arabisch-islamische Organisationen in Kasachstan. Exogener Einfluss auf die islamische Erneuerung 1991-2007,* Berlin 2009, 145-156.

48 Michael Jackson, »Introduction: Phenomenology, Radical Empiricism, and Anthropological Critique,» in Michael Jackson (ed.), *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology.* Bloomington 1996, 1-50.

49 Michael Lambek, »Certain Knowledge, Contestable Authority: Power and Practice in the Islamic Periphery«, *The Journal of the American Ethnological Society*, 17 (1990), 23-40.

50 Leyla von Mende, »Mecque de la pédagogie: Two Ottoman Study Guides and Their Plea for Swiss Pedagogics«, *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* LXV 4 (2011), 919-944.

51 For the role of Islam in countries of the former Soviet Union see: Stephane A. Dudoignon (ed.), *Devout Societies vs. Impious States? Transmitting Islamic Learning in Russia, Central Asia and China, Through the Twentieth Century*, Berlin 2004 (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, Band 258); Bakhtijar Babadžanov, Aširbek Muminov and Anke von Kügelgen, *Disputy musul´manskich religioznych avtoritetov v Central´noj Azii*, Almaty 2007; see also: Sophie Roche (ed.), *Central Asian Intellectuals on Islam. Between Scholarship, Politics and Identity*, Berlin (ZMO Studien 32, forthcoming).

and passing on of knowledge and education (about religion and the world) is prescribed or strongly recommended. For example, among coastal Muslims in Kenya we can speak of a kind of morally underpinned »knowledge economy«, referring to the frequent invocation and negotiation of knowledge (both Islamic and other) in everyday life, and the status and moral responsibilities it conveys upon its holders.[52] While this does not specifically relate to current practices of mobility, the kind of knowledge economy concerned would in each case be shaped according to the connectivity and openness characteristic of the respective society. Hence, each knowledge economy also draws on mobility as a historical resource that contributes to processes of migration to-and-from a given locality and its respective society.

In a different manner, Jill Alpes discusses a »knowledge economy of emigration«, referring to the practices and circumstances of mobility in the context of attempts to migrate from Cameroon to Europe. Here, the concept marks a dynamic system of certain appropriate ways to have success in the execution of one's migration plans. These include precautions about the sensitive handling of the plan; as a rule for the Cameroonian contexts she researched, the preparations must be kept secret until the final accomplishment of migration, as the potential of failure (caused by envy, witchcraft, and the like) would otherwise be high.[53] Referring to related circumstances of pervasive aspirations of people in Kinshasa (Congo), looking to migrate to places promising a better economic future, Filip de Boek draws attention to how the spread of knowledge about past migratory experiences of African peers about the globe has led to a more conscious consideration of options, making it possible to weigh advantages and disadvantages of the anticipated migratory experience. Over the last few decades, Congolese migrants have gone beyond the (previously standard) destination of Paris. As such, alternative »models« of a Chinese and an Angola pathway of labour migration (with their respective risks, promises, and downsides) have emerged in recent years.[54] In general, migrants from Muslim (and other) contexts in Africa, South Asia or the Middle East usually take their choice to be between Europe and the Gulf states. In these contexts, a number of narratives of success and failure circulate among aspirant migrants.

With respect to the movements and actions of people in the transregional borderlands of Central-Asia, a »complex, fluid, and heterogeneous space«, Magnus Marsden insists on a methodological »need to understand the agency of frontier actors and their political choices in relation to particular constellations of networks and circumstances«. These networks and circumstances provide (sometimes unexpected) opportunities. With an eye to the ambivalent – both centrifugal and centripetal – processes that are »bringing its people together at the same time as they are pulling them apart«, Marsden focuses in on a range of »skills and sensibilities that people use to move across this world«, replete with its historical interconnections and differences. He explains that knowledge of, and familiarity with, relevant sorts of connections – on linguistic, ethnic, trade, and religious planes – as well as the ability to draw flexibly from them as required in situations when necessary, marks the particular versatile aptitude with which people in these borderlands may pursue seemingly diverse and contrasting agendas successfully.[55]

Translocal actors have to consider a complex set of competing world-views, ideologies and social norms, as they face and tackle a wide range of (partly changing) challenges in their everyday lives. Based on this experience of exposure to a multiplicity of demands and ways of coping, their agency (their potential to select befitting ways of acting) develops accordingly. In concrete terms, people acquire or develop the equivalent sets of skills and knowledge while undergoing these experiences. This takes place in a permanent field of tension between the demands of everyday life and established patterns of coping on the one hand, and the structures of social and political orders within which they are embedded on the other. Processes of knowledge acquisition accompany people's life journeys. Thus knowledge (through experience) can be said to accumulate as a resource to be passed on and made use of in the future. Perhaps we can say that knowledge and skills acquired through experience in multiple settings, or through exposure to adverse circumstances and environments that are influenced by multiple and diverse backgrounds and traditions, has a different status and becomes a more valuable resource than mono-local knowledge. Ultimately, this could then inform a particular idea of »cosmopolitanism« as the ability to move skilfully within an interconnected (yet ever more regulated) world.[56] This must be

52 Kai Kresse, »Muslim Politics in Postcolonial Kenya: Negotiating Knowledge on the Double-Periphery«, in Filippo Osella and Benjamin Soares (eds.), *Islam, Politics, Anthropology*, Chichester 2010, 72-90.

53 Maybritt Jill Alpes, »Bushfalling: The Making of Migratory Expectations in Anglophone Cameroon«, in Graw / Schielke (eds.), *The Global Horizon*, 43-58.

54 Filip de Boek, »City on the Move: How Urban Dwellers in Central Africa Manage the Siren´s Call of Migration«, in Graw / Schielke (eds.), *The Global Horizon*, 59-86.

55 Magnus Marsden, *Fragments of the Afghan Border*, London 2011, 10-11.

56 See: Kai Kresse, »On the Skills to Navigate the World, and Religion, for Coastal Muslims in Kenya«, in Magnus Marsden and Kostas Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam:*

seen, however, as a distinctly ambivalent experience, at a time when the restrictions to movement and participation in the globalised consumer world are as strictly enforced as never before – while at the same time information and knowledge about it are spread out as never before. As has been mentioned, for many of the people we study, »globalization is [...] primarily experienced in its absence«,[57] in the unavailability (or unaffordability) of recommended goods, things or freedoms; it is marked by the unfulfilled yet ever growing set of promises and aspirations to a better life.

Conclusion

We have tried to demonstrate how important aspects of the agency of translocally situated individuals and groups can be approached through an assessment of their mobility. These aspects were:

- firstly: migrating, travelling, moving;
- secondly: creating homes and networks;
- and thirdly: producing, maintaining and mediating knowledge.

There may be some specific demands and obligations in place for Muslims regarding »Islam« in general, albeit Islam is interpreted differently by Muslims across various regions, denominations, periods and historical experiences. Yet what predominates in our discussion and also in our outlook is the potential for our reflections to contribute to studies of and hypotheses about society (for social theory) beyond »Muslim Worlds«, from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective.

Furthermore, we have tried to show that the sense in which a social actor is either in a state or process of »moving« or »having moved« (as we also know from our own experience) is or can be a matter of opportunity and coincidence, »chance« and »whim«, as much as of actual need. It can also result from a choice based on careful decision-making that takes into account constraining and facilitating factors. The aims that people project into their actions (or their decisions not to act) can be limited to apparently »simple« concerns relating to struggles of survival in adverse everyday circumstances, or to lead a »better life«. However, they can equally reveal conscious and dedicated normative engagements concerning wide-ranging social changes, as part of politically, socially or indeed religiously defined movements. These may be cast as local, regional, national or global interest groups, and are held together by normative rules and frameworks, as in the case of the *umma*.

Taking *mobility* as a starting point, when studying movement patterns and processes, reflects a basic preference for analytic clarity and openness as to the contextual and comparative considerations that may emerge, in turn making room for novel empirical and conceptual considerations. Simply put, *movement* itself is fluctuation in space, the changing of localities; and *mobility* is the potential to move. The latter is the most basic term and thus analytically the most useful, especially as we seek to relate forms and dynamics of movement – the exercise of mobility – to the agency of people moving or migrating, including those considering to do so but possibly (and for various reasons) remaining where they are.

By choosing, as we have, agency and mobility as the most basic terms of analysis equally applicable to all social actors – as social theory does and should – we capture the special and indeed characteristic instances of prescribed obligations (to move, travel, acquire and disseminate knowledge etc.) that are immanent to interpretations of Islam, which appeal to all Muslims as special cases within a larger history of human agency and movement. This is framed in normative terms that can be captured within a conceptual framework applicable to all social actors. There is, in our view, no special case to be made for »Muslim agency« or »Islamic mobility« as such, not least because religious actors do not see themselves as exclusively or even predominantly »religious« actors.[58] In fact, many do so explicitly and above all in moments of ritual practice (as much as they keep to them) and in situations of moral (or at least normative) justification of their own actions, or in their critique of others'.

Certain cultivations of piety and strong currents within recent interpretations of Islam in the Muslim world push an exclusive and dedicated attitude to regard all of one's own actions as »religious« and indeed »Islamic«. Furthermore, this demand often extends to one's peers. These recent piety movements must be noted, and could receive more attention than we have given them in the preceding pages. Indeed, recent historical and anthropological research on Muslim worlds has sought to trace and capture these more recent social developments.[59] But in principle, and in methodological terms, for the understanding of the aspirations,

Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds. Amsterdam 2012, 77-99.

57 Knut Graw, »On the Cause of Migration: Being and Nothingness in the African-European Border Zone«, in Graw / Schielke (eds.), *The Global Horizon*, 23-42, here 32.

58 Samuli Schielke, »Second Thoughts About the Anthropology of Islam or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life«, *ZMO Working Papers* 2 (2010), http://www.zmo.de/publikationen/WorkingPapers/schielke_2010.pdf (accessed 30.12.2013).

59 For anthropology: e.g. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton N.J. 2005; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*, New York 2006; for history: e.g. Dietrich Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere. Religious Groups in India, 1900-1947*, New Delhi et al. 2006; Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, New Delhi 2000.

goals, actions and movements of Muslims, we need no extra disciplinary equipment. Rather, we need clear and basic analytic categories within which human action on the whole, even in its most complex and fuzzy ways, can be described. In addition, of course, as scholars dealing with Muslim societies we need as much knowledge about Islam as possible (as a major normative reference point for the social actors whom we seek to understand). But this should be knowledge (above all) with a view to the people we seek to understand. What matters to us is not so much an abstract general knowledge about »Islam« as such, but a deep *and* broad knowledge of Islam in practice (including its demands and sources of consolation), in the multiple, diverse and competing interpretations of the people whom we study. This is a kind of knowledge, based on texts, material sources, and especially social observation and interpretation, that seeks to follow the respective actors' perspectives through the employment of our own forces of imagination. Ultimately, as researchers covering the actions of Muslims (and others) in translocal life-worlds, we seek to capture as best we can their interpretations of particular experiences in an inter-connected world, in which some of these people are moving and others are not.

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